



"Kein' Regel wollte da passen, und war doch kein Fehler drin."

DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG, act ii.

The Meister.

VOL. VI.

AUGUST 13, 1893.

No. 23.

Wagner, the Playwright.

BY LOUIS N. PARKER.*

HOW are we ever to get a complete and exhaustive survey of Wagner's genius? The three-score years and ten, which some of us are doomed to reach, would be insufficient for the complete study of one side only. Yet we can barely use the middle 20 for the purpose. For until we are 20 we don't think much of Wagner, and are convinced we could do better ourselves; and after 40 we recant our manhood's enthusiasms, and write articles in the reviews to show

* This article is condensed, with the author's sanction, from a paper read to the Wagner Society by Mr Parker on May the 9th.—ED.

we have passed our midsummer madness. But who could hope to exhaust Wagner the composer, in 20 years? or Wagner the prose-writer, or Wagner the philosopher, or Wagner the poet, or Wagner the architect, or Wagner the conductor, or Wagner-the man, or Wagner the stage-manager, or Wagner the playwright. And what can I say on the latter subject in one evening?—

A playwright, in my idea, is a poet and a seer. He has absorbed the experience of the whole world from all time, and is able to crystallise it in one pregnant line. The motives which move mankind are all familiar to him. He knows all passions, while he himself is passionless. His eye probes the lowest depths of a villain's heart and sees all the monstrous thoughts which float there like shapeless crakens in a sea of night; his eye is not dazzled by the purity of a virgin's soul. All sorrows, all pains, all temptations, all joys, all heroisms, all meannesses, are familiar to him. He is surprised at nothing; he sympathises with nothing; he judges nothing: he looks on. The moment he moralises, the moment he obviously leans to the side of virtue, or panders to vice, he ceases to be a playwright or a poet.

Allow me an illustration. Here is an oyster; and here are three men. The first man looks at it: it is an oyster, and there an end. That is *homo simplex*: the average man. The second examines it, finds it is a sick oyster, and describes it to us with minute detail. Either he writes a farcical comedy, and makes us laugh at what we ought to loathe and detest, or he gets sentimental and awakens our sympathy for the horrible thing. In either case, if he is working in England, he is obliged to add hypocrisy to his other crimes and call the oyster a mussel. Then comes the third man. He sees the oyster. He probes it, and dissects it, and sets it before us without a word against it or a word in its favour. "There is your oyster," says he, "as I see it, judge whether it be an oyster or no." And in nine cases out of ten we find a pearl. Witness Othello. Witness Shylock, witness Macbeth, witness Tristan and Isolde. This is the dramatist in the highest sense; but a great many worthy people profess

themselves immeasurably distressed by such a method of treatment. They say they want to be taught, but they seem to be incapable of absorbing a lesson unless their master says explicitly: Lo, I am teaching you. Yet this is not the method of any single playwright who has survived; it is only the method of the showman who sets up a temporary booth along the wayside, which is presently carted away. While it stands, the big drum makes a great noise, and the flare-ups cast a lurid light, and the people who pass by say, This is the Drama; but when it is carted away, the grass grows green where it stood, and the next generation does not even remember the name of the showman.—

Against Wagner the playwright one accusation has been brought with nauseating persistency: that he did not treat of men and women at all, that his characters are not flesh and blood but abstractions, nebular presentations of myths or philosophies. As Dickens was accused of never having drawn a gentleman, Wagner is accused of never having drawn a man or a woman. Really? Then why are we lifted out of ourselves, so that, while the action lasts, the stage seems to us the real world, and we but shadows? Let us briefly examine how Wagner wins men's wills, so that they surrender themselves thus completely to his spell. What is the "trick"? The trick, I consider, may be divided into three parts: Directness, Simplicity and Repose.

Take his Directness first. Think of any of his works from *The Flying Dutchman* onwards. Is there an unnecessary character in either of them, or a superfluous scene, or a wasted word? You think at once of the three Norns, whom you have seldom or never seen in England. Wait until you have seen them. You might just as well cut the three witches out of *Macbeth*. You think of *Erda*, you think of *Waltraute*; and my answer is the same. Put it another way. If a character is superfluous on the stage, he bores us or we forget him; we have no distinct image of him. Now think of the smallest parts in Wagner's dramas, and acknowledge that they are living realities, each with its own individuality, each doing something to the furtherance of the plot.

There is no such thing as a subsidiary part in any of them. But if the characters are necessary, then I think I may take it for granted that the scenes in which they appear are also necessary, and therefore the words they utter.

And now observe what types they all are. It is the common and easy thing to say that the Trilogy is devoid of human interest. But are not Siegfried and Brünnhilde human? Human in their weakness as in their strength, in their faults as in their virtues. Which of the characters is un-human? Not Hagen, nor Gunther, nor Guttrune, to be sure. The Gods? The Gods are Gods, but they are not characterless or colourless. Is Wotan colourless in his fury? or Logé in his mischief? Is Fricka unhuman? Are there no jealous wives nowadays? Why, they all reek with humanity, and that is one of the most strikingly ingenious features of their presentation. While their majesty and far-offness is never in danger, we feel all the time that these are gods of man's creation: they are the outgrowth of the simple faith of early races, and their attributes are therefore those of the men who imagined them. Their virtues are strength in battle, courage, and even cunning; their vices are those of prehistoric man, and, let me add, of 19th century man, too.

Another point I should like to draw your attention to is, that in all the gallery of Wagnerian characters, which includes 117 separate speaking parts, there are no two alike. Or put it another way: if you mention the name of any one of them, you get a clear picture of a clear-cut individuality. David, Magdalene, Daland, Wolfram, Pogner, Eric, Erda, Guttrune; these are all portraits, and they stand out just as clearly as the heroes and heroines. These 117 different characters have all something vital to the action to do, and their importance arises not from the necessities of the plots in which they figure, but from their own natures. Thus every thing is linked together in so masterly a manner, that the more we examine the workmanship the more are we astounded at its neatness and directness.

This really includes the Simplicity I have mentioned as

Wagner's second great quality. There are no side-issues whatever. There is never an under-plot. There is in each work one great motive, and that one great motive is worked out until all the possibilities with which it is pregnant are brought to light. There are no episodes which you can detach and present by themselves. This, I am quite aware, is contrary to all our present-day rules for fashioning what somebody has called a sound, actable play; but you will find, on reflection, that Wagner's system is true to life, while ours is true to nothing at all. For, if you will think of your own lives, will you not come to the conclusion that no single event in them could be cut out without altering the entire course of your history? But in a play which is supposed to represent life in little, how much more closely ought events to be knitted together. There one word which is not necessary to the full development is an artistic blunder. I defy anyone to find that word in Wagner. The one work of his which may seem at first sight to contradict everything I have said, is his wonderful comedy, *Die Meistersinger*. This appears to have a crowd of motives. We have the pedantry of the masters themselves, the independence of Walther, the middle-aged infatuation of Beckmesser, the prize-singing, the festival and pageantry, and Sachs dominating the whole. But what do all these details lead up to? They all lead up to Eva. Walther is in love with her; Beckmesser is in love with her; so, if the whole truth were known, is Hans Sachs; so is the entire Guild of Mastersingers. In this play there is a pair of comic lovers, but their existence is germane to the plot; and were it not for David's jealousy of Beckmesser, the street riot in the second act would not take place, and therefore Walther would not take refuge in Sachs's house, or write his prize song there, and the whole play would fall to pieces. Nay, it would fall to pieces if the watchman did not blow his horn. The *Meistersinger* is the most elaborate of Wagner's works, and in none of the others shall we find any of the apparent side-issues (for they are only apparent) which seem to meet us here. The *Nibelungen* moves relentlessly from the rape of the Rhinegold to the inevitable doom of the Gods. *Parsifal* can

hardly be said to have a plot at all, and *Tristan* is more pitiless still.

Now we have reached the third point which in my opinion entitles Wagner to rank among the highest dramatic poets, which places him on the same level as Æschylus and Shakespeare; namely Repose. Wagner's repose is a subject which a critic of Schlegel's type could profitably treat in a volume; and which I almost despair of even faintly elucidating to-night. All the more, as we have nearly lost the quality on the contemporary English stage. I will try to make my meaning clear by an example. The introduction to *Parsifal* begins, as you are aware, with a heart-searching melody interrupted by long silences; there is a period of storm and stress in the middle, and then the music sinks back to long-drawn phrases and weighty silences. The curtains open, and what happens?—Nothing, or next to nothing. There is an ideal landscape laughing in the summer sun, a venerable priest is asleep under a tree, and two youths recline beside him with their heads on his shoulder. Silence. In the far distance trombones solemnly hail the rising sun. The sleepers wake. What do they do? They turn their backs to the audience, and kneel in prayer during some 20 bars of very slow, very stately, very solemn strains, interrupted again by pregnant silences. We don't know who they are, or what they are doing, or why they are there; and yet those who have seen *Parsifal* performed at Bayreuth will tell you, that there is not a more solemn or beautiful moment in the entire drama. This is Repose. The mind of the audience is taken hold of in a mighty grip, it is cleared of all worldly cobwebs, swept and garnished, and the devotional key-note of the mystic play is at once struck, never to pass out of our hearing during the rest of the evening.

To sum up so far, I have tried to shew that, eliminating the music altogether, we are justified in claiming for Wagner the foremost place among poetical playwrights, next to, and on a level with, Shakespeare. Nothing is wanting, neither clearness

of characterisation, nor simplicity of exposition, nor breadth and grandeur. He is pre-eminently the poet of human emotions and human passions, yet in all his weavings you shall not find one unclean word, or one unworthy thought. He is the poet of Nature who brings before us all her charms and terrors. He makes the Evening-star a person in his pageant, the murmuring stream, the woods with their weird whisperings and the pure flowers of the paschal meadows; in his plays the Spring bursts open the doors and treads as a god over the stage. He bends the rainbow for our delight, or he loosens the whirlwind and smites the rock with the hammer of Thunder.—Would to heaven his enemies, and some of his friends, were under that hammer!—As for the human heart, it has no secrets for him. He is above all the dramatist of young life, of the joy of life, and the might thereof. Men must love him for the godhood he has conferred upon them in his mightiest heroes; for what man does not glory in Siegfried, in Tristan, or in Sachs? And women must love him as the poet of Brünnhilde and Isolde. Nay, they must love him for every woman he has drawn, Senta, Elisabeth, Elsa, Sieglinde, Eva, and Kundry. There they stand, the equals and more than the equals of the heroes with whom they are mated. Wagner's work is an epic of strong healthy life. There is not a morbid or decadent moment in it, but always the rush and rapture of youth.

Now I should like for a few minutes to discuss the technical side of Wagner's skill. It is difficult to separate the technical from the theoretical in so subtle an art as his, and it is all the more difficult in so empirical a craft as that of stage-writing. For the rules of the craft have never been formulated. I would they had! There used in the simple and happy old days to be rules affecting what were called the Unities. Thus we had the unities of time and place. You had then to write five acts in one scene, and the time allowed you was the time which your action would take in real life. But we have changed all that, and now we flit gaily from Timbuctoo to Twickenham, and light-heartedly

ask the audience to imagine a lapse of a hundred years in the entr'acte. There are now no rules for writing a play; there are no rules, but there are points, the necessity of which everybody can understand. The first point to which I should like to allude, is the colossal skill which Wagner displays in boiling down the most immense subjects and presenting them to us in their simplest dramatic form. The most striking instance of this is in the *Trilogy*, wherein he has set before us the whole of the Northern Mythology, together with an entire epic of legendary history, in four short plays—for remember how short and pithy these plays are, divested of their musical illustration. It would take me much too long to examine the *Nibelungen Trilogy* closely, but let me draw your attention to Siegfried's life and adventures compressed into only two of the evenings. All the adventures are there; the whole life is spread before us; the whole character of the hero is made plain to us, and we not only see what he does, but we know what he thinks. We see the boy with the untamed bear, we see him forge his sword, we see him kill the dragon, we watch him finding the Tarnhelm and the ring, we see him follow the bird whose song is made eloquent to him, we see him fearlessly scatter the splinters of Wotan's spear, we see him pierce the flames shielding Brünnhilde, we see him quake with a new sense of awe before the divine maiden's beauty, and we watch him awaken to manhood and passion. Then we follow him as he hurries on to his doom. From his birth to his death, no event of his life is hidden from us; and in eight hours the whole marvellous story is unrolled. And that not episodically. The bear, the sword, the dragon, the bird, are not picturesque details dragged in to spin out an evening's show; they are the links in a long chain of tragical and fateful logic, and the chain would be worthless were one of the links missing.

If you want to realise the full extent of this side of Wagner's genius, dig out for yourselves the history of *Tristan and Isolde* as it stands in *Malory* and the old chroniclers, and compare it with Wagner's poem. These dear old chroniclers wandered about at

their own sweet will. They began their stories without thinking of the end at all. They were like some cottage grandam, who sits in the ingle-nook of a winter's evening and hails the children about her knees, and begins: "Once upon a time," and so drifts on without forethought or plan, mingling one tale with another, confusing one hero with another, and wandering on without a beginning and with no particular end. We listen spell-bound to her story, for it is full of marvels and the music of her voice is like an echo from forgotten eld; but our reason often revolts, and we should dearly like to cross-examine her as to her facts, were she not so venerable. Has it not shocked you as it has shocked me to find that, after all, Tristan married another woman, and that her name was, of all names in the wide world, Isolde? Has the skill of our latter-day poets reconciled you to the idea, and has not Tristan, our mighty long-suffering knight, seemed belittled? In the old chronicles he does much worse things than that. There his adventure with the true Isolde is but an episode in a life of wild and woful deeds.* But Wagner with his poet's eye, sees the true pearl lying hid in the pitiful tale, removes all the dross from it, and brings the incomparable jewel before us in all its purity and brilliancy. With a handful of characters—to speak by the card, with six principals and three subsidiary persons—he sets before us the most absorbing tragedy produced since Shakespeare's day—and that without the aid of any very remarkable scenery or any striking or sensational incident. Here is a test of his skill. If you try to tell the story of Wagner's drama in your own words to a hearer wholly unacquainted with it, your first thought will be, that it must be quite easy, as there are so few persons concerned. But if you want to include all the matter which Wagner has put into it, I doubt very much whether you can tell it in much less time than the book would take to read aloud. But mind you, when he has done, when the curtain has fallen for the last time, there is nothing more to know. Neither Tristan nor Isolde has any secrets from us. We know their past history as well as that

* Not, however, in Gottfried von Strassburg's glorious epos.—ED.

part which we have seen. We have no questions to put, no explanations to ask for. All is there. It is a rounded and polished whole, and what we have not seen or heard, is of no moment whatever. Wagner has ruthlessly cut away all excrescences, but all the vital elements of the story are there. This is the triumph of technique. For the first time—very nearly—in the history of the drama, we are able to see all round and through the personages.

But the playwright has to concern himself with much more vulgar details of technique, if he wishes to grip his audience. They seem vulgar, that is to say, when they are pointed out; but the way in which they are used makes all the difference, and determines whether they shall be considered common-place clap-trap or strokes of genius. You who have written plays will remember that three or four almost insurmountable difficulties always presented themselves. The first is how to begin,—it is so much easier *not* to begin a play!—the second is how to interest your audience in your hero or heroine before he or she has entered, the third is, how, in the name of all that is worth mentioning, you are to get the curtain down. In all these points the young playwright cannot do better than go to Wagner for lessons. His opening scenes are often as fine and as deeply enthralling as any subsequent scenes in his plays. I have already instanced the opening of *Parsifal*. The opening of *Die Meistersinger* will occur to everybody as another inspired instance; equally great is the beginning of *Tristan*; and what other poet ever invented such a prologue as the *Rheingold*? There is no futile talk between servants, no impossible witticisms bandied about by members of a stage-mob, no chorus of happy peasants, no bacchanal songs by intoxicated soldiers. We go to work at once. As soon as the curtain rises we are in the thick of the play, and he does not let us go till the curtain has fallen for the last time.

And now consider the means he uses to arouse our excitement and interest in his heroes and heroines. They do not walk on to the stage unannounced. Their coming is in many cases the principal event, the situation of the act. *Lohengrin* will at once occur

to you as a fine example of this. The whole of the first act of that drama consists, in effect, in the arrival of the silver-armoured knight; but the first act of *Parsifal* is a still better instance. . . .

Having seen how Wagner begins, let us, for a moment, consider how he ends. It is the rule in common dramatic practice to bring the curtain sharp down on some striking situation. The experts will tell you that as soon as you have reached a climax, down must come the curtain. It does not really matter much what you have in the rest of the act. Fill it out with cuttings from the comic papers, put in anything you like, but work up the excitement five minutes before the curtain falls, and when you have got your excitement, bring it down with a rattle and bang. This is of course, absurdly untrue to life. There, situations are not created in this spurious manner, and I am not aware that disclosures and painful predicaments are put an end to suddenly by any such convenient device. Now, Wagner's drama is an idealised and hugely magnified transcript of life, and in no single case—at any rate in his later work—has he brought the curtain down on what would be described as the situation of the act. Take that first act of *Parsifal*. The situation is the elevation of the Grail; but that is not where the curtain falls. The grail fades and is enclosed in its shrine. The knights disperse. The king is borne out in his litter. Parsifal staggers out at the postern gate and Gurnemanz is left alone in the great empty hall. Then the choristers in the highest dome repeat the prophecy, and as the old knight slowly goes out, revolving the prophecy in his mind, the picture closes in.

The noblest example of this ending in repose, of this melting away of a situation, is the close of the second act of the *Meister-singer*. What a chance for bringing the curtain down in the middle of the street-fight! How we should wonder what became of Walther and Eva under the tree, and whether Beckmesser ultimately escaped from David's basting. Why it is really as good as a farcical comedy! It is just as good and no better. Wagner does not forget that he is a poet. The watchman's horn is heard, the crowd flies asunder; Pogner shelters Eva; Sachs draws Walther

into his house and drives David home ; Beckmesser goes limping and cursing down the narrow street. The watchman enters, rubs his eyes, tells us the hour of the night, and passes out. The stage is empty and still the curtain does not fall. What more is to happen ? Nothing—everything ! The moon rises ! And at once the whole scene we have just witnessed, with its colossal mirth and noise and strife, is idealised. At once we are transferred into the realms of poetry and romance ; we remember that this is S. John's Eve, and that the gnomes and sprites are working their mischief. The riot now becomes mere midsummer madness, which will leave no trace of ill-feeling on the morrow. And observe that the moon is not brought in for itself. We don't puzzle our heads as to how it is done ; we are only conscious of a beautiful artistic finish to the act ; of a full satisfying sense of repose.

In conclusion let me say, that the student who wishes really to get somewhere near the bottom of Wagner's art, should, before he hears the music at all, seek to acquaint himself thoroughly with the dramatic side. The critics and journalists have misled you all these years. They have insisted on Wagnerian 'lengths,' on scenes which might be cut out, until the public has come to believe that Wagner is long, and to take no offence when scenes *are* cut out. Thus it is difficult to find a performance of the *Götterdämmerung* wherein the opening scene between the three Norns is retained. Yet that scene is absolutely necessary for the due comprehension of the immense tragedy. Again, the scene between Waltraute and Brünnhilde is ruthlessly shortened. But till we grow to feel that these are mortal stabs at Wagner's dramas, we shall not have entered into the spirit of his art.

Wagner's Letters from Paris, 1841.

III.

May 5, 1841.



T is becoming clear to me that I must use main force at last, to come to speak of *Berlioz*; for I see that the thing will not arrange itself through opportunity.

This very circumstance, that in discussing the everyday events of the Paris world of pleasure,—or if you will, of Art,—I have not had occasion to light upon the talented musician, to me seems characteristic enough; moreover it gives me a good topic for introducing my estimate of *Berlioz*, who in any case has the right to demand that I should quite specially devote to him a lengthy page in my *News from Paris*.

Berlioz is no incidentally-arisen composer; I therefore could not happen on him incidentally. He stands in no connexion, and has nothing to do with those sumptuous, exclusive art-Institutes of Paris; since his first appearance, the *Opéra* and the *Conservatoire* have shut their doors on him with marvellous haste. People have forced *Berlioz* to be and stay a decided exception to the long, great rule, and this he is and stays both from within and without. Whoever wishes to hear his music, must go expressly to *Berlioz*, for nowhere else will he meet with any of it, not even in places where one meets *Mozart* and *Musard* cheek by jowl. One hears *Berlioz*' compositions only in the concerts he himself gives once or twice a year; these remain his exclusive domain: here he has his works played by an orchestra specially trained by himself, and before a public which he has conquered in a ten-years' campaign. But nowhere else can one hear a note of *Berlioz*', unless it be on the streets, or in the 'Dome,' whither he is summoned from time to time to a politico-musical function of the State. This sequestered attitude of *Berlioz*, however, not only extends to his outer situation, but in it lies also the main ground of his inner evolution: however much a Frenchman, however much his nature and tendency are in sympathy with his countrymen,—yet he stands alone.

He sees no one in front of him, on whom he could rely; no one beside him, on whom he might lean. From out our Germany has the spirit of Beethoven blown across to him, and there certainly have been hours when Berlioz wished to be a German; it was in such hours, that his genius spurred him on to write as our great master wrote, to speak out the thing he felt was spoken in his works. But so soon as he seized the pen, the natural pulsing of his own French blood set in again; of that same blood which surged in Auber's veins, when he wrote the last volcanic Act of his *Stumme* [Masaniello],—happy Auber, he knew no Symphonies of Beethoven! But Berlioz knew them, and what is more, he understood them,—they had filled him with enthusiasm, they had intoxicated his brain (*Geist*), and yet—he was reminded that French blood was running in his veins. Then he felt that he could *not* become as Beethoven, but alike perceived that he could not write like Auber. He became Berlioz and wrote his "*Symphonie fantastique*," a work at which Beethoven would have smiled, just as Auber smiles in fact, but which was able to send Paganini into ecstasies, and to gain for its creator a party that will hear no other music in the world but Berlioz' "*Symphonie fantastique*." He who hears this symphony played in Paris by Berlioz' orchestra, with himself at its head, must in truth believe that he is hearing a wonder such as he had never met before. An enormous inner wealth, a titanic phantasy drives before it an orgy (*Pfuhl*) of passions, as though from out a crater; what we behold, are colossal clouds of smoke, only parted and modelled into fleeting shapes by flashes and streaks of fire. Everything is gigantic, daring, but endlessly painful. Beauty of Form is nowhere to be lit on, nowhere the repose of a majestic stream to whose sure movement we might trust ourselves in highest hope. The first section of Beethoven's C-minor-symphony would to me have been a sheer charity, after the "*Symphonie fantastique*."

I have said, the French tendency is predominant in Berlioz also; in fact, were this not the case, or were there any possibility that he should remove himself therefrom, then we perhaps might

have in him what one calls, in good German, a disciple of Beethoven. That tendency, however, makes it impossible for him to approach directly the Beethovenian genius. It is the tendency towards Without, the search for correspondence of extremes (*das Aufsuchen der gemeinschaftlichen Anklänge in den Extremitäten*). Whereas in social life the German loves to withdraw into himself, to search within him for the true wellspring of his productive force, on the contrary we see the Frenchman striving after that spring in the uttermost peaks and outcrops of Society. The Frenchman, who thinks first of all of entertaining, seeks the consummation of his art in the ennoblement, in the spiritualising of this entertainment; but he never lets his eye stray from the immediate goal, namely that that art shall be pleasing, shall be able to fascinate the greatest possible number of listeners. Effect, the momentary 'working,' thus is and stays with him the main affair: should he entirely lack the inner force of intuition (*innere Anschauungskraft*), then he is contented with the reaching of this goal alone;—should he be gifted, however, with a true creative force, then he certainly avails himself of this Effect, but merely as the first and weightiest means of giving to the world his inner intuition.—

What a strife, then, must there not arise in the soul of an artist like Berlioz, when on the one hand a strenuous force of inner intuition drives him to draw from the deepest, most mysterious fountain of the world of ideas; while on the other, the demands and qualities of his fellow-countrymen, to whom he belongs and whose sympathies he shares, nay, when his own constructive bent is pointing him to utter his chief message in the most external elements (*Momenten*) of his creation? He feels that he has something out of the ordinary, something infinite, to give forth; that Auber's speech is far too petty for it; yet that it must sound more or less like that speech, to gain an entrance to his public's ear. And so he falls into that bedevilled, modernly-striking tone-speech with which he stuns and charms the gapers, and scares away those who would easily enough have understood his intentions from within outwards, but decline the trouble to feel their way into them from without.

Another evil is, that it seems as though Berlioz were quite pleased with his isolation and sought to barricade himself therein. He has no friend whom he might think worthy of being asked for counsel, whom he might permit to draw his attention to this or that lack of Form in his works.

I was filled with deep regret, in this respect, by a hearing of his symphony: "Romeo and Juliet." Amid the most genial of inventions there is heaped in this work such a mass of bad taste and false art-economy, that I could not ward off the wish that Berlioz had shewn this composition, before its performance, to some such man as Cherubini, who, without doing it the slightest injury, would certainly have had the wit to unload it of a quantity of disfiguring encumbrances. Yet, with his excessive sensitiveness, even his most intimate friend would never dare to make such a proposal; while on the other hand he grips his audience to such a degree, that they behold in him a phenomenon quite beyond compare and past all measure. Wherefore Berlioz will always remain incomplete, and mayhap will only shine as a wonderful, but transient exception.

And this is a pity! If Berlioz would only make himself master of the many excellences which have issued from the latest, brilliant period of modern French music; were he able to give up that isolation which he maintains with such pride of mind, to lean, for a *point d'appui*, on any worthy manifestment of the musical epochs of the past or present: then Berlioz undoubtedly would acquire so mighty an influence over the musical future of France, that his fame could never be forgotten. For Berlioz not only possesses creative force and originality of invention, but he is graced by a virtue which is customarily as foreign to his composing fellow-countrymen as to us Germans is the vice of coquetry. This virtue is, that he does not write for gold; and he who knows Paris and the ways and doings of Parisian composers, knows how to value that virtue in this country. Berlioz is the remorseless foe of everything common, beggarly, and smelling of the gutter,—he has sworn to strangle the first organ-grinder who shall dare to play his

melodies. Terrible as is this oath, yet I feel not the smallest alarm for the life of any one of these street-virtuosi; rather am I convinced that no one will treat Berlioz' music with greater contempt, than the members of this wide-spread guild of musicians. And still, no one can deny that Berlioz has a talent even for producing entirely popular compositions: popular, at any rate, in the most ideal sense. When I heard the symphony he wrote for the re-interment of the July-victims, I felt within me that every gamin in a blue blouse and red cap must understand it to its deepest core; though I certainly should call this understanding more a national than a popular one, for a long stretch of road has been put behind one, between the *Postillon de Longjumeau* and this July-symphony. In truth, I am half inclined to rank this composition above all the rest of Berlioz' works; it is noble and great, from the first to the last note;—all diseased exaltation is kept at bay by a lofty patriotic inspiration, which lifts itself from the wail of grief to the highest pinnacle of apotheosis. When I further take into account the good service done by Berlioz in his thoroughly noble treatment of the military 'wind,' the only instruments here placed at his disposal, then at least in regard of this symphony I must recall what I said above, concerning the future of Berlioz' compositions,—with joy must I express my conviction that this July-symphony will exist and enkindle, so long as there shall exist a nation which names itself the French.—

I observe that I have completely fulfilled my duty of writing something about Berlioz, especially in the matter of length and breadth. I therefore think it will now be proper, and conducive to my correspondence, that I pass forthwith to the notices of the day.

In the very first instance, I come back once more to Berlioz; for I must tell you of the concert given by *Liszt* for the benefit of Beethoven's memorial, and which Berlioz conducted. Wonderful! LISZT—BERLIOZ—and in the middle, at the head, or at the tail (whichever you please), BEETHOVEN! One might digress, and write a Berliozian symphony on this threefold theme! One might put questions to the power which made and makes all that is and

has been,—one might ask — — — Let us not ask,—but wonder at the wisdom and goodness of Providence, which created a Beethoven!—Liszt and Berlioz are brothers and friends; both are acquainted with and honour Beethoven, both strengthen their forces at the wonder-fountain of his riches, and both know that they could do no better thing than give a concert for Beethoven's memorial. Yet there is a shade of difference to be made between them; before all things *this*, that Liszt gains money without having expenses, whereas Berlioz has expenses and gains nothing. But this time, after Liszt had replenished his coffers by two golden concerts, he gave exclusive thought to his *gloire*; he played for poor mathematical geniuses, and for Beethoven's memorial! Ah! how gladly would many an one give concerts for Beethoven! Liszt could *do* it, and at like time afford a proof for the paradox: that it is a splendid thing to be a famous man. But *what* would and could not Liszt be, if he were no famous man, or rather, if people had not made him famous! He could and would be a free artist, a little god; instead of being, as now, the slave of the most perverted of publics, the public of the virtuoso.* This public demands from him, at all costs, wonders and foolish tricks; he gives it what it wants, lets himself be carried away at its hands,—and plays, in a concert for Beethoven's memorial, a fantasia on Robert the Devil! This happened, however, against his will. The programme consisted solely of Beethoven's compositions; nevertheless the fatal public demanded with a voice of thunder Liszt's *tour-de-force par excellence*, that Fantaisie. For the gifted man there was no help, but with words hastily extorted from his chagrin: "*Je suis le serviteur du public; cela va sans dire!*" he sat down to the piano, and played with crashing brilliancy the favoured piece. Thus avenges itself each crime on earth! One day in heaven, before the assembled public of the angels, will Liszt have to perform that fantasia on the devil! Mayhap, however, it will then be for the last time!

* Should some of these sentences sound harsh or unsympathetic towards Liszt, it must be remembered that he himself practically endorsed them over and over again, not only in his letters, but by giving up his career of *virtuoso* about six years after the above was written.—TR.

Among Berlioz' eminent qualities, must be reckoned his ability as conductor ; he proved it afresh in the aforesaid concert. There is a good deal of talk about his soon getting the post of *chef d'orchestre* to the Grand Opéra, in which event Habeneck would take Cherubini's place at the Conservatoire. The only obstacle is Cherubini's life ; everything is in waiting for his death, apparently to then at once give concerts for his memorial, since he has already been so shamefully forgotten in his lifetime.

Would any one believe that the composer of the "Water-carrier" lives here in Paris, and yet in none of the thousand places where people make music, can one hear a note of that "Water-carrier" ! I am uncommonly fond of everything new, am devoted to the Mode as never another man, and live in the firm persuasion that its rule is as necessary as powerful :—but when the change of fashion goes so far that a man like Cherubini is totally forgotten, then I should prefer to fetch down again the old coat in which I was confirmed, and which I wore when I heard the "Water-carrier" for the first time.

However, we do get an old opera given us now and again. I remember with real delight "Joconda," which was played last winter at the Opéra Comique ; my heart was so full, although the house was very empty ; on that evening I could not conceive why Mons. Clapisson composes operas, since there is really no need for them while one still has "Joconda." All the same, the needs of men, especially of theatrical directors, are of wondrous sort ; these gentlemen often allow pieces to be made, and operas composed for them, well knowing in advance that they are not worth a jot, that they are bound to fail because no one will listen to them,—and yet they pay for them 20,000 francs ! God only knows, what they want them for ! This was about the case, the other day, with an opera by Mons. Thomas, "*le comte Carmagnola*." It had only two Acts, was absurdly wearisome, made an amazing failure,—and yet the Director of the Grand Opéra had paid the above-named sum for it,—apparently as compensation for the *droits d'auteur*, which certainly don't mount very high in the case of an operatic failure. You see, how a man can make his fortune here !

I just remember that, up to now, I have not written you a word about the *Heinefetter* (Kathinka),* and this delightful acquisition deserves to be made much of, above all in a *German Correspondence*. This charming singer—who, as you will know, made her début in *La Juive*—continues to root herself more and more firmly in the favour of the public. She may indeed pride herself on having celebrated a veritable triumph on that début; for not only was she *not* supported by the opera-director, but this gentleman positively turned all the enormous powers of his *claque* against the débutante. Certain exceptional complications had brought it home to the director, that such a manœuvre was necessary; what saved the Heinefetter, in spite of him, was in the first place her distinguished talent, but in the second the very circumstance that the director's intentions were made a little too manifest. The whole house took her part, and it was refreshing to see how the lions of the boxes routed the *chevaliers du lustre* ["knights of the chandelier"]—as are called the members of the benevolent institution of the *Claque*—by storms of applause.—The position of the Heinefetter is assured, and the diligence and modesty which she combines with her talent, allow one to confidently assume that in her the Opéra has won one of its greatest adornments.

Things have not gone quite so happily with Fräulein Löwe.† I have already told you about her first success, as well as the success of that success, in the matter of an engagement at the Grand Opéra. I informed you, at the same time, that Frl. Löwe was engaged for the Italian Opera; this report I can now confirm, but must add to it, that the engagement was merely for the London season, so that the German vocalist has arrived at no appearance on a Paris

* This singer is also mentioned in the "Parisian Amusements," written by Wagner for Lewald's *Europa*, probably a month or so earlier than the above (see THE MEISTER No. XVII.).—Tr.

† From the notice of Sophie Löwe in *Grove's Dictionary of Music* I may cite the following extracts, as bearing on the present subject: "She appeared at Covent Garden, May 13, '41, in Bellini's 'Straniera,' but her success was only temporary. . . . She had been puffed as a new Grisi, there being an idea that Grisi had lost her voice. . . . In 1848 she married Prince Lichtenstein and retired."—Tr.

stage. She has therefore been confined to singing at concerts, and I am sorry to have to say that her further appearances were followed by no such favourable result as the first, in the concert of the *Gazette Musicale*. Certainly, her general choice of vocal pieces was most unfavourable. Whereas one had the first time passed over the fact that she sang the "Adelaïde," a composition which by no means unreservedly suits her singing powers, yet one was at last astounded to find that she continued *almost exclusively* to sing this particular song. In vain she tried by an Aria of *Graun's*, and such-like, to cheat the public of the monotony of this procedure; on the contrary, the unlucky Aria has contributed much to her failure: the Frenchmen found these yard-long, old-fashioned roulades by far too foolish, and, good Christian though I am, I must confess that I myself could not restrain a laugh.* What, then, might be expected of the Parisians, who believe in nothing, not even in Graun?—It is possible and desirable, that Frl. Löwe may repair her somewhat damaged fame, at the Italian Opera in London; however, even there a victory will not be an easy matter for her, for take all in all, one must admit that the Grisi, too, is something, and not so easily to be put in the shade.

But let us not anticipate events in London; my rights of Correspondence do not extend as far as *there*. I must remain in Paris; and here, alas! there will soon be nothing important left; at least, of what my pen is fit for. Summer is coming on, and with it the Actions of State and Revolutions,—a bad chapter, and one from which a German musician must hold himself aloof. Nevertheless my Correspondence shall receive a dazzling, politico-historical finale. What could be more historical, more political, or more dazzling, than the baptism of the Comte de Paris, and the fireworks allied therewith? Yet again, what can be more brilliant—not to fall out of line with Music!—than the *Concert monstre*

* In *Grove's Dictionary* we find that Carl Heinrich Graun (1701-59) was born at Wahrenbrück, near Dresden, and was educated at the famous Kreuzschule, whither Wagner himself went a century later. In Germany his *Te Deum* ('56) and his *Tod Jesu* are celebrated. According to the above authority, the latter work has been performed annually in Passion-week, since 1755, in the Cathedral of Berlin.—Tr.

which is to be given a few days hence in the gallery of the Louvre, at which Louis Philippe will attend, and during which—as I have been told in strictest confidence—he will abdicate the throne, sung out by an Aria of Auber's? It will be an exciting scene, and therefore, as I particularly need repose at present, I shall have to be content with declining an invitation to that concert—sent me, no doubt, with a view to its being properly puffed in the "*Abend-Zeitung*." So I shall leave it to your Political Correspondent to report, and confine myself here to the baptism and fireworks. The ancient *Notre-Dame* received with exemplary friendliness the little man—you know that the baptisee is getting on for three years old,—and listened with admiration to the speech which—as I am assured by someone who stood quite close—the young Count delivered at the font. In the evening the selfsame *Notre-Dame* blazed forth in fire-balls, rockets and crackers*—not religious ones, however, nor yet political. For convenience' sake it had been set up not far from the Tuileries, and consisted of much cardboard, wood, and powder. Down to the smallest detail, each stone, each pillar, and each ornament of the lofty stone-mother, was counterfeited; all the world huzzahed and leapt for joy,—as for myself, I seemed to see the sexton aloft. The people pressed and crowded; I praised the prudence of the Government, who had ordered a quite special set-piece to be fired at the *Barrière du Trône*, in order to keep at arm's-length the evil dwellers of that suburb.

You see, I am becoming political; let me therefore stop; for a further sally into the field of baptisms and fireworks must inevitably end in leading me into by-ways from which, perhaps, I should only be able to find my way out through the approaching concert in the Louvre. As this *Concert Monstre*, however, with its five-hundred musicians, is equally beyond my powers, I can only avoid all evils by committing myself to your hands in all haste and obedience, as

Yours most sincerely,

RICHARD WAGNER.

* "*Schwärmern*,"—means also, and more generally, "*fanatics*."—Tr.

Señor R. de Egusquiza, the Spanish painter and aqua-fortist, has been engaged, the last eight years, upon an important Wagnerian undertaking. This is an attempt to reproduce in a series of canvases, to be afterwards made generally known by means of etchings executed by the artist himself, some of the leading figures of Wagnerian drama. The aim of the artist is to provide for the study or dwelling-house an image of the Wagnerian *ensemble*, as the theatre offers us the entire art-work itself. He believes that his undertaking will commend itself to those Wagnerians who concern themselves with the *whole purpose* of the master.—Of this series, etched portraits of Wagner and Schopenhauer (the latter as possessing near kinship to the Wagnerian idea) were issued three years since, were widely distributed, and, in proof state, are now scarce. Now come two others, viz.: a portrait of the late Louis II., King of Bavaria, and a "symbolic frontispiece" to the entire work, representing the sacred vessel, the Grail itself. The portrait of "the last of the Kings" is taken, not during his later years, but at the moment of his accession to the crown, (1864,) i.e. four weeks before he had sent the messenger to Switzerland to discover the whereabouts of Wagner. It is an excellent likeness, while the execution is characterised by several admirable technical qualities not always found in the equipment of painters with a purpose.

In the Etching of the "Grail," the dove poises itself on the edge of the cup, its head irradiated, while the faces of two angels, exquisitely touched in dry-point, hover above. On one hand is Klingsor with the stolen spear—"hüt' ich mir selbst den Graal!"—on the other is a dragon, presumably symbolic of obscurantism. The cup, which is shewn as glowing with the miraculous Blood, rests on a marble table; or is it Titirel's tomb?—The portrait of the King measures 47 x 37 centimètres; 20 Parchment Proofs at 100 fr., and 20 Japanese Proofs at 50 fr. The picture of the Grail measures 28 x 23 centimètres; 20 Parchment Proofs at 60 fr., 20 Japanese Proofs at 30 fr.; to be obtained of Señor R. de

Egusquiza, 32 Rue Copernic, Paris, or of any London print-seller.

The series of paintings, of which two Etchings are to be completed per annum, is already well advanced. There are to be eight plates on "Parsifal," two on "Tristan," two on "The Ring." A new bust of Wagner, cast *à cire perdue*, will also figure in the group.

C. D.

* * *

We still, in London, have to look to the orchestral concerts, for adequate performances of Wagner's instrumental music; and this should be a sufficient reply to those who decry the execution of 'morsels.' While Hans Richter continues to visit us—unfortunately far too briefly—there is no fear that the impressions gathered from most of the Wagnerian *operatic* performances will be seriously considered as answering to the works themselves. To go from St James' Hall to Covent Garden, on a later-Wagner night, was like passing from a splendid line-engraving to a lithograph.—But, before taking that journey, we must single out for special praise four works as executed by Dr Richter's band. The rendering of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony was almost the finest 'classical' performance we have ever heard, while at another concert the sparkle of Mozart's G-minor Symphony was reproduced in a way to shame the vapid bombast of an overture by Goldmark which preceded it. On another occasion the *Tristan* Vorspiel was done as even Richter has never done it before; while Madame Nordica surprised us with a rendering of the closing scene of the *Götterdämmerung* which made us forget the diamonds on her gown, those diamonds for once refraining from mounting to her voice;—it really, *now*, looks as though Mme. Nordica may become our greatest singer of 'heroic' Wagnerian rôles.

At Covent Garden we must confess to disappointment, widely shared. In the first place, several inquiries from the country had reached ourselves as to the dates of performance &c. of single works, but the usual agents had no information to supply, and up to a week—or sometimes two—before the work was actually

given, the public was unaware what particular Wednesday it would be given on. To those at a distance from town this has been a serious drawback, and undoubtedly accounts for a slight falling-off in the attendance,—though we must say that the gallery and amphitheatre were crowded on each occasion. Next, we were promised representations “in the same manner which met with such favourable reception last year.” Had this been fulfilled, we should have been moderately content; for, whatever the defects in the quality of the instruments, last year’s conductor, Herr Mahler, though by no means great, was yet capable and vigorous, and the singers were well chosen. This year, however, we had a conductor who seemed afraid, either of his band, or of the works. To give an instance,—the earliest,—every one knows the *sforzando* in bars 17 to 18 of the *Tristan* Vorspiel: it was barely *mezzo-forte*; we appeased ourselves by the thought that Herr Steinbach was reserving himself, but bar 44 came, with its “molto crescendo,” and still but a flicker of passion; while the grand climax of bars 62 to 84 fell miserably flat. The same with the *Walküre*, until its third act; and only *Siegfried*—where the call for ‘*leidenschaft*’ is less exacting, and where the ‘wind,’ if tolerably good, can pull the whole thing through,—only *Siegfried*, with its rôle that fits Alvary like a glove, was given a satisfactory rendering. Beyond Alvary, Fr. Reuss-Belce (*Sieglinde*) was good, and so was Wiegand for the most part; but Lieban’s ‘Mime’ and Fr. Olitzka’s ‘Erda’ were the best rendered of the whole. Frau Moran-Olden was generally capable as the *Walküre*, in that work, but scarcely in *Siegfried*, nor as *Isolde*. Think of Sucher or Klafsky, and the exaggeration, the busyness of Frau Olden’s ‘business’ becomes obvious.

We trust that Sir Augustus Harris will forgive us the above. We can readily imagine the difficulties he must have encountered, in the endeavour to engage the best artists that money could procure, while so many of them are reserving themselves for Munich, and it must

be palpable that a later work of Wagner’s requires far more rehearsals than can be given to it without some very special arrangement; but when the ‘*Daily Telegraph*’ can write that “the conditions were favourable to a demonstration as impressive as any of those which curiosity helped to make last year,” it is high time to protest against an indulgence inspired by that ‘daily’s’ hope “that Wagnerian music-drama is as far as ever from winning English favour, and owes such support as it enjoys in this country mainly to a natural and laudable Teutonic patriotism. We do not wish to hide our satisfaction with this state of things.” Presumably this ‘daily’ prefers the meretricious sensationalism, and crude attempts at orchestral colour, of “Pagliacci”—which Tito Mattei could have written better, and which lifts the *Cavalleria* in one’s estimation, at a bound; but in any case, let us be spared this eternal “German audience” cry: to anyone who frequents the gallery, it must seem ridiculous, about as foolish as the late attempts of that same ‘daily’ to prove our London Wagner Society was “German,” by discovering on our list of members the gigantic proportion of about one-sixth whose names it could remotely trace to German derivation!

Before quitting the Wagner performances, we must give our warmest praise to the gem of the whole, the marvellous rendering of the *Flying Dutchman*’s second act by Madame Albani and Mons. Lassalle.

We have received from Messrs H. Grevel & Co. “WAGNER AND HIS WORKS” by H. T. Finck (2 vols. 21s.) which we can strongly recommend to the Wagnerian beginner; and from the Librairie Fischbacher, Paris, Kufferath’s “LA WALKYRIE” (? 2 fr.), J. G. Freson’s “L’ESTHÉTIQUE DE RICHARD WAGNER” (2 vols. ? 6 or 7 fr.) and Georges Noufflard’s “RICHARD WAGNER D’APRÈS LUI-MÊME” (2 vols. 7 fr.). The last-named is the best work of *longue haleine*, on this subject, that we have yet met; but reviews must be held over till our next issue.